

Message Text

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SUBJECT: LAURIN UNVEILS WHITE PAPER ON CULTURE

REF: A) QUEBEC 0155 B) QUEBEC 0066

1. QUEBEC'S MINISTER OF STATE FOR CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT CAMILLE LAURIN YESTERDAY (JUNE 6) TABLED IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY HIS LONG-DELAYED WHITE PAPER ON CULTURE. THE PAPER ORIGINALLY WAS TO APPEAR IN NOVEMBER 1977, SHORTLY AFTER THE ADOPTION OF BILL 101, BUT HAS BEEN DELAYED REPEATEDLY. IT CONSTITUTES A WIDE-RANGING BLUEPRINT FOR A FUTURE QUEBEC IN WHICH THE GOVERNMENT WOULD TAKE THE LEAD IN FOSTERING, IN LAURIN'S WORDS, "CULTURAL DEMOCRACY FOR THE NATION."

2. THE WHITE PAPER CORRESPONDS IN GENERAL TO THE VERSION WHICH WAS LEAKED SEVERAL WEEKS AGO (REFTEL A) IN THAT IT DEFINES CULTURE IN THE WIDEST POSSIBLE CONTEXT AS THE "LIVING ENVIRONMENT" FOR QUEBECERS, AND PROPOSES INITIATIVES TO BE TAKEN IN SUCH DISPARATE FIELDS AS HOUSING, HEALTH, RECREATION, WORK, COMMUNICATIONS, AND INFORMATION. LAURIN SAID THAT THE BASIC PRINCIPLE UPON WHICH HIS CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY IS BASED IS THAT
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CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT IS EQUALLY AS IMPORTANT TO A PEOPLE AS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, THAT QUEBECERS HAD A RIGHT TO A "CULTURAL MINIMUM AS WELL AS A MATERIAL MINIMUM." LAURIN ACKNOWLEDGED THAT SOME OF THE MEASURES HE PROPOSED COULD NOT BE REALIZED WITHIN THE PRESENT CONSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT AND WOULD HAVE TO WAIT UNTIL "QUEBEC ATTAINS ITS

SOVEREIGNTY.

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THE WHITE PAPER WAS INTENDED NEVERTHELESS, HE SAID, AS A ROAD MAP, AN OBJECTIVE, A VISION OF THE TOTALITY OF A FUTURE QUEBECOIS SOCIETY AND CULTURE "UNSHACKLED" FROM CANADA.

3. HAVING DEFINED THE ISSUE IN SUCH SWEEPING TERMS, THE PAPER GOES ON TO LIST A LARGE NUMBER OF SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION WHICH STRIKE AS RELATIVELY UNCONTROVERSIAL. THE GOVERNMENT PROPOSES TO REALIZE WITHIN THE NEXT TWO YEARS, FOR EXAMPLE:

- THE CREATION OF A COMMISSION FOR THE ARTS AND LETTERS TO ADVISE THE GOVERNMENT REGARDING ASSISTANCE TO QUEBEC ARTISTS;
- THE REESTABLISHMENT OF THE QUEBEC OPERA;
- A NUMBER OF MEASURES TO SUBSIDIZE AND PROTECT QUEBEC CULTURE IN THE AREAS OF BOOK PUBLISHING AND MOVIES;
- CREATION OF A NON-PROFIT BODY TO PROMOTE SCIENTIFIC INFORMATION;
- A PROGRESSIVELY PROHIBITIVE TAX ON TOBACCO PRODUCTS TO PRODUCE "THE FIRST GENERATION OF NON-SMOKERS" IN TEN YEARS;
- PROGRAMS TO MAKE LEISURE AND WORK MORE MEANINGFUL, INCLUDING FLEXTIME, ELIMINATION OF MANDATORY RETIREMENT FOR AGE, AND IMPROVED WORKING CONDITIONS.

A NUMBER OF OTHER PROPOSALS IMPINGE ON WHAT ARE NOW FEDERAL JURISDICTIONS. THE PAPER PROPOSES, FOR EXAMPLE, THAT FEDERAL PARKS AND HISTORIC SITES BE TURNED OVER TO THE PROVINCE; THAT THE PROVINCE ENACT ITS OWN COPYRIGHT LEGISLATION; LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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AND THAT THE PROVINCE BE GIVEN CONTROL OVER CABLE-TV DISTRIBUTION.

4. INITIAL REACTION IN THE PRESS HAS BEEN RELATIVELY TEPID. THE ANGLOPHONE PRESS, WHICH WAS PERHAPS EXPECTING SOMETHING FAR MORE STRINGENT ALONG THE LINES OF A NOTORIOUS MACLEAN'S MAGAZINE ARTICLE WHICH APPEARED LAST MARCH (REFTEL B) APPEARED TO BREATHE SOMETHING LIKE AN EDITORIAL SIGH OF RELIEF. THE MONTREAL STAR HEADLINED "PROPOSALS OFFER LITTLE CONTROVERSY" AND THE PAPER'S QUEBEC CORRESPONDENT, JAMES STEWART, DISMISSED THE REPORT AS "450 PAGES OF THE WINDIEST AND EMPTIEST PROSE ANY GOVERNMENT HAS INFLICTED ON TAXPAYERS IN RECENT MEMORY." THE MONTREAL GAZETTE, WHILE EXPRESSING CAUTIOUS APPROVAL FOR SOME OF THE PROPOSALS IN THE WHITE PAPER, CALLED THE BULK OF IT "YAWNINGLY BLAND." LA PRESSE HIGHLIGHTED THE CONTRAST BETWEEN THE SWEEP OF LAURIN'S VIEW OF SOCIETY AND THE RELATIVELY MODEST NATURE OF THE SPECIFIC PROPOSALS, TERMING THE PAPER A "REFLECTION OF THE UNCERTAIN POSITION OF THE QUEBEC GOVERNMENT OSCILLATING BETWEEN THE IDEAL OF CONDITIONAL POLITICAL SOVEREIGNTY AND THE NECESSITY OF ADMINISTERING THE DAY TO

DAY AFFAIRS OF THE STATE."

5. COMMENT: DURING THE MONTHS OF DELAY IN THE RELEASE OF THE WHITE PAPER IT SEEMED CLEAR THAT MAJOR MODIFICATIONS WERE MADE IN ORDER TO ELIMINATE SOME OF THE MORE CONTROVERSIAL PROPOSALS. IN THE TOUCHY AREA OF THE CONCENTRATION OF MEDIA OWNERSHIP, FOR EXAMPLE, THE PAPER BACKS OFF FROM A CONTROVERSIAL PROPOSAL WHICH APPEARED IN A LEAKED DRAFT SEVERAL WEEKS AGO. THE DRAFT CALLED FOR GOVERNMENT REGULATIONS SPECIFYING THE MINIMUM PROPORTION OF CAPITAL STOCK IN MEDIA COMPANIES THAT WOULD BE OWNED BY QUEBECERS, AND PROVIDED FOR MAJORITY REPRESENTATION OF QUEBECERS ON MEDIA COMPANY BOARDS. IN THE FINAL VERSION, THIS PROPOSAL HAS BEEN ELIMINATED COMPLETELY AND THE GOVERNMENT IS SIMPLY URGED TO LOOK INTO THE QUESTION OF CONCENTRATION OF OWNERSHIP.

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6. BY LAURIN'S OWN ADMISSION, THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS BOUNCED THE PAPER BACK TO HIM MANY TIMES FOR REWRITING. WE HAVE SPECULATED PREVIOUSLY THAT LEVESQUE AND OTHERS WANTED TO AVOID A REPLAY OF LAST YEAR'S BITTER AND DIVISIVE FIGHT OVER BILL 101, AND THAT THEY HAVE THEREFORE DRAWN MOST OF THE TEETH FROM LAURIN'S PAPER. IF THAT IS THE CASE, WE MAY SEE A BACKLASH IN THE NEAR FUTURE FROM PQ MEMBERS URING A FAR MORE AGGRESSIVE POLICY. IN ANY CASE, LAURIN' S MAGNUM OPUS APPEARS TO US, AT FIRST BLUSH AT LEAST, T O BE THINNER GRUEL THAN ANTICIPATED. WE WILL HAVE FURTHER COMMENTS AS LOCAL REACTION DEVELOPS AND WE GET A BETTER LOOK AT THE DOCUMENT. MCNAMARA

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